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ABSTRACT

This article explains from the viewpoint of a faculty member how the College of Education at the University of South Florida has undergone reform. The book, "Changing the Practice of Teacher Education" (Mary Diez), is used as a theoretical framework in describing that process of reform. The article describes current external pressures for change that include teacher education trends and accrediting organizations. The focus is, however, internal influences within the College of Education at the University of South Florida, specifically the activities of one large core group, the Project PASS (Performance Assessment System for Students) team. The Project PASS team was funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Education. The author is a member of the Project PASS team and a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. Conclusions are based on personal observation and the theoretical framework for change in teacher preparation programs provided by Mary Diez. An appendix contains a timeline of events for reform at the College of Education. (Author/SM)

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Running head: PROJECT PASS: A CHANGE AGENT IN TEACHER PREPARATION AT USF

# Project PASS: A Change Agent in Teacher Preparation at the University of South Florida

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Abstract

Project PASS: A Change Agent in Teacher Preparation at the University of South Florida

This article explains from the viewpoint of a faculty member how the College of Education at the University of South Florida has undergone reform. The book, Changing the Practice of Teacher Education, by Mary Diez is used as a theoretical framework in describing that process of reform. The article describes current external pressures for change that include teacher education trends and accrediting organizations. The focus is, however, internal influences within the College of Education at the University of South Florida, specifically the activities of one large core group, the Project PASS team. The Project PASS team was funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Education. The author is a member of the Project PASS team and a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. Conclusions are based on personal observation and the theoretical framework for change in teacher preparation programs provided by Mary Diez.

# Project PASS: A Change Agent in Teacher Preparation at the University of South Florida

How does change occur in large institutions? Specifically how does change occur in teacher preparation programs within large colleges of education? Some have said that trying to bring about changes in education has been compared to moving cement.

This article describes a change process in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. University of South Florida's College of Education is the largest urban education college in the United States and produces more teachers than any other university in Florida. The University of South Florida has become the second largest university in the Southeast with a student body of 36,000 on campuses in Tampa, Lakeland, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota-Manatee (University of South Florida, 2001).

Although change in a large institution moves slowly and does take a concerted effort, change is possible. This article explains from the viewpoint of a faculty member how the College of Education at the University of South Florida has undergone reform. The book, Changing the Practice of Teacher Education, by Mary Diez, provides a firm theoretical framework in describing that process of reform.

Diez explains that the change process in a large institution begins with external and internal influences. In turn, those pressures can result in "disequilibrium" when an institution questions the assumptions that guide its current practices (Diez, 1998). Disequilibrium occurs when the state of balance or equality between conflicting interests or desires wavers.

One major external pressure that has had an impact on the College of Education at the University of South Florida involves trends in the field of teacher education in the United States and specifically in the state of Florida. Those trends include standards-based designs, accountability, performance assessment, and multiple measures of student performance (Blum & Arter,1996; Campbell, 2000; Diez, 1998; Marzano & Kendall, 1996; Moss, 1999; McConney & Ayres, 1998).

In addition to external pressures regarding teacher education trends, accrediting organizations have also influenced change at the University of South Florida's College of Education. For instance, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has recently developed new standards that encompass the trends mentioned above. The new standards have moved away from a course-based approach in which guidelines describe what should be covered in courses, toward a description of what teacher candidates ought to know and be able to do (NCATE, 1999). The new standards require that evidence used for the decisions about a program come from assessments and evaluations of candidate proficiencies in relation to those standards. Moreover, the program faculty is responsible for documenting not only that candidates are meeting the standards, but also how well they are meeting them (NCATE, 99).

Besides external pressures for change, there have also been internal influences at the University of South Florida's College of Education. For example, the dean's office has provided some leadership for change. One activity was the use of prominent guest speakers to encourage the faculty to think about different ways of doing things. A variety of speakers were scheduled every couple of months. Another activity was a college wide

retreat where professors from within the College of Education presented papers related to reform issues, and faculty was given the opportunity to engage in discussion. In addition, work groups were created within the College of Education, and these groups have been working at various paces on their assigned areas of reform. At another college wide retreat, the work groups presented their findings and/or products generated thus far.

Another internal force has been faculty who develop and maintain programs or grant projects. For example, students and faculty in the Early Childhood Program are experimenting with electronic portfolios. In the Special Education Program, students' progress is closely monitored through portfolios, seminars, and advisor-advisee relationships. In the area of grants, the College of Education sought and received a major grant from the Florida Department of Education. The emphasis of the grant was to prepare pre-service teachers to better address Florida's curricular goal, the achievement of high levels of PK-12 learning. This was to be accomplished by creating an innovative approach to assessment that involved a continuous cycle of pre-service teacher diagnosis, development, and evaluation. This grant was named "Project PASS," and the acronym PASS came from Performance Assessment System for Students.

Project PASS, innovations at the program level, and leadership from the dean's office are examples of internal forces. When these are combined with external forces such as trends in the field and standards from accrediting organizations, disequilibrium can occur. This is happening in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. Although there is questioning of the assumptions that guide current practice, disequilibrium is not happening at the same rate across the college. There are individuals

and groups at various stages of disequilibrium ranging from those that are enthusiastic and anxious to change practice to those who are content with the status quo.

Diez, in her explanation about the change process in a large institution, says that following disequilibrium a great amount of energy is needed at the beginning of the change process to keep the ball rolling. She states:

> What is needed is the commitment of a core group of people interested in making improvement, who agree to work toward the development of a common vision. This group must be large enough to provide energy to move the vision forward and bring others into the process (Diez, 1998, page 42.).

At the University of South Florida College of Education, Project PASS has been one vehicle for change that involved a large core group who developed a common vision. Project PASS was developed as a collaborative effort within the College of Education and between other colleges and institutes within the university and the local school districts. The collaborative nature of the project was demonstrated by the membership on the Project PASS team. Faculty representing the following departments, colleges, and institutes were regular members of Project PASS:

Childhood, Language Arts, & Reading Education

Secondary Education

Special Education

Physical Education, Health, and Wellness

Psychological and Social Foundations

Leadership Development/Regional Campus

Measurement

Program Review

Technology Services and Resources

Florida Center for Instructional Technology

Dean's Office

College of Arts and Sciences (Watts, 2000).

The Project PASS team has facilitated change by supporting an essential process of reform, relationship development. Diez explains that in viable teacher education institutions, change is supported by two major processes: relationship development and process design. Diez points out that internal relationships are needed to promote group thinking and to develop work products. Institutions require sufficient time to allow this to happen. External relationships are beneficial as well. She encourages institutions to learn from each other (Diez, 1998).

Internal and external relationships were encouraged through Project PASS. The number of meetings over time strengthened internal relationships. The PASS team met once a week for approximately eight months and then met biweekly or monthly for four months. Each PASS team meeting was approximately two hours long. Faculty members of the team were given a course release or paid a stipend during the period of weekly meetings. Attendance averaged 73% (Watts, 2000). Having the time to meet consistently facilitated the generation and development of new ideas.

Another key to building internal relationships was the collaborative efforts of the PASS team members. A strong leader who kept the group on task and moving forward

facilitated the meetings. She also encouraged faculty to provide ideas and made them feel like their ideas were important. When surveyed, PASS team members indicated that the meetings were productive, team members received the information needed, and that products were the result of teamwork. Members also felt that they had the opportunity to provide input and work with other departments and colleges. The minutes from four randomly selected meeting dates were reviewed and the rate of participation was averaged. During these meetings, approximately 80% of the members were noted in the meeting minutes with contributions (Watts, 2000).

A final attribute of the PASS team that built internal relationships was the use of subcommittees. After three months of meeting as a single group, ideas had been formulated but needed further development. At this point, subcommittees were formed that met outside of the regular PASS meetings. As the subcommittees worked on prototypes of two different systems, members sought and received feedback from the PASS team.

Similarly external relationships were encouraged through Project PASS. When the PASS team began meeting, one of the first activities was a review of current literature on teacher assessment. From this review, the Teacher Work Sample Methodology developed at Western Oregon University became a model. Work samples were requested and sent from Western Oregon University. Additional information was gained when one of the designers of the Teacher Work Sample Methodology presented to the PASS team. As a result, members of the PASS team developed the Continuous Teaching Cycle at the University of South Florida. The Continuous Teaching Cycle is a process that better

prepares teacher candidates to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and to use assessment data to improve instruction and student performance.

At the same time that information was being gathered from other universities, information from departments within the College of Education at the University of South Florida was being shared at PASS team meetings. For example, a member of the Special Education department, a Science methods professor, and a Physical Education faculty made presentations on how they use portfolios with their students. A member of the Measurement department presented the department web site and a program used to determine student grades and track progress. This was one of the first times that faculty across the College of Education had had a chance to hear about what others in the same college were doing. On many occasions, members of the PASS team expressed surprise by saying things like "I had no idea that you were working on something so similar to what I have been doing."

The gathering and disseminating of information was not limited to the individual faculty members themselves. Other organizational units were privileged to PASS team efforts. For example, throughout the PASS project, members of the PASS team communicated the team's progress to their departments at department and program meetings. Members of PASS also shared the group's work at the Undergraduate Council Committee.

Besides collaboration within and among universities, external relationships were developed with four school districts. The leader of PASS met with representatives of these districts, and a School Connection Team was developed. Members of the School

Connection Team were teachers from each of the four area school districts that were brought together to review PASS products and to provide feedback from a school or classroom point of view. When surveyed, the School Connection Team members indicated that they were encouraged to provide the PASS team with ideas, that their ideas were important in the development of products, and that modifications were made based on their input. (Watts, 2000).

As a result of both internal and external relationships, three products have resulted thus far from the work of the PASS team: the Continuous Teaching Cycle, the Performance Assessment System for Students, and a template for an electronic portfolio. The Continuous Teaching Cycle is a process that a pre-service teacher performs during an internship. The Continuous Teaching Cycle includes eight behaviors that create a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, teaching, and reflection. The eight behaviors are:

1. Identify pre-assessment measures.
2. Identify learning outcomes.
3. Consider student characteristics and their learning environment.
4. Identify a topic and its curricular context.
5. Reflect on teaching decisions that were made and on the future direction of learning.
6. Report on learning growth.
7. Identify post-assessment measurement strategies.
8. Generate instruction experiences.

The Continuous Teaching Cycle has been developed as a prototype that is currently being piloted on pre-service teachers (Watts, 2000).

A second product is the Performance Assessment System for Students. The system is composed of interactive data driven web pages that ultimately generate a large database. This system was developed to be independent of course grades. The purpose of the system is to manage data that tracks how well each pre-service teacher has mastered the Florida Accomplished Practices. In the system, faculty or departments create performance tasks that measure the Accomplished Practices. These tasks can be weighted to designate a major emphasis, a moderate emphasis, or a low emphasis within an Accomplished Practice. Within a course, teacher candidates complete the tasks and the instructor enters their level of performance into the system. The levels include: not demonstrated, partially demonstrated, and demonstrated. A major advantage of this system is that a student's performance on Florida's Accomplished Practices can be monitored across courses. Florida's Accomplished Practices are being correlated to learned societies' standards. This enables programs and departments to track information or student progress in relation to these standards as well. The Performance Assessment System for Students is an early prototype that is currently being piloted with members of the PASS team. The PASS team is continuing to formulate ideas about how to monitor student progress and how and when to intervene when students are not being successful.

Although the PASS team intends for the Continuous Teaching Cycle and the Performance Assessment System for Students to be used college wide, the third and final product is viewed as an option for students. This is a template for an electronic portfolio.

The PASS Team is just beginning its work on the electronic portfolio. A small group of students form the Early Childhood Department have begun developing electronic portfolios, and the PASS team is using their feedback to make modifications to the template.

Although these products were presented to faculty during department meetings and to the School Connection Team as they were created, they did not seem to have a profound effect until this past summer when the Continuous Teaching Cycle and the Performance Assessment System for Students were presented at two different meetings. What occurred at these meetings is an ideal example of disequilibrium. The first presentation involved a small group of College of Education faculty across departments who were chosen by PASS team members. Many of those selected were chosen because of their vocalism, status of power within the department or college, and/or likelihood of being resistant to change. After the presentation, there was much time given to discussion. The faculty positively received the Continuous Teaching Cycle. The Performance Assessment System for Students was generally received in a positive way, but there were some faculty who had administrative concerns in the use of the system (Watts, 2000). There were at least three faculty members who vehemently opposed the Performance Assessment System for Students. The second presentation occurred at a College of Education retreat. The leader of the PASS team gave the presentation, and there was limited time for discussion. Both the Continuous Teaching Cycle and the Performance Assessment System for Students were generally received in a positive way (Watts, 2000).

Although administrative concerns about the Performance Assessment System for Students surfaced again, there were not any strong voices of opposition to it.

Although the faculty concerns about the Performance Assessment System for Students may be legitimate, Diez points out that one of the major hurdles to overcome is shifting attitudes about change from one of "this is an added-on burden" to one of "we are rethinking the way we work." To perpetuate change, Diez suggests a continuous improvement model that relies on good communication and change over time in phases. Last, Diez sets out two major recommendations: (1) to anticipate responses of faculty and participants, and (2) to invite a wide range of faculty to participate in designing courses and programs (Diez, 1998). Again the PASS Team has attempted to follow these recommendations in helping to lead reform efforts in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. A timeline of events is given in Appendix A.

There have been many strategies that have been successful thus far in creating change occur in the College of Education at the University of South Florida. First, leaders have recognized the element of timing. Change occurs more readily when the time is right. Both external and internal pressures influence timing. Second, leaders have realized the value in bringing a wide range of faculty together to discuss ideas on reform topics. This has occurred through college wide retreats and the use of work groups. Specific insights about work groups can be gained from examining how the PASS team operated. The PASS team was an interdisciplinary work group that consisted of faculty who were innovative and supportive of change. These faculty were given sufficient time to meet regularly and most were given the opportunity to work on the PASS team as part of their

assigned load instead of it being in addition to their normal responsibilities. Thus, it can be deduced that adequate funding to support change is necessary. Furthermore, the PASS team had a strong leader who effectively facilitated meetings. She also delegated and monitored the work of subcommittees. The PASS team used good communication within the College of Education and with local school districts.

The PASS team has been a catalyst for disequilibrium. It has changed the climate, and it has created new possibilities for the College of Education. In looking at the change process, the College of Education at the University of South Florida is in the beginning stages but it is moving forward. Change in large institutions like the College of Education at the University of South Florida takes much time and moves slowly. This occurs because of the complexity of the topics, the interdisciplinary roles of those involved, the vast number of viewpoints and personalities, and the difficulties associated with re-establishing equilibrium – finding a balance between all of those conflicting interests.

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# Appendix A

Timeline of Events for Reform in the College of Education at the University of South Florida

| Time | Event |
|---|---|
| Fall, 1998 | Begin use of prominent guest speakers college-wide. |
| August, 1999 | College-wide retreat. |
| January, 2000 | PASS team begins meeting. |
| January – February, 2000 | PASS team reviews current literature.<br>PASS team hears presentations from programs within the College of Education. |
| February – March, 2000 | PASS team hears presentations from other universities and institutions. |
| March-April, 2000 | PASS team subcommittees create prototypes of the Continuous Teaching Cycle and the Performance Assessment System for Students. |
| April-May, 2000 | PASS team members share information at department and program meetings.<br>PASS team presents Continuous Teaching Cycle to the School Connection Team. The School Connection Team pilot it and give feedback. |
| June, 2000 | PASS team modifies Continuous Teaching Cycle and continues the development of the Performance Asssessment System for Students.<br>PASS team decides to make an electronic portfolio an option for students and/or programs. |
| July, 2000 | PASS team prepares for trial presentation of products to faculty selected by members of PASS.<br>PASS team works are grading criteria of Performance Assessment System for Students. |

| | |
|---|---|
| August, 2000 | PASS team does trial presentation and collects written feedback.<br>PASS team presents at college-wide retreat and collects written feedback. |
| September, 2000 | Pilot testing of Continuous Teaching Cycle with students in the Physical Education Department.<br>Grant funding for PASS ends. |
| October, 2000 | Pilot testing of Performance Assessment System for Students with members of the PASS team. |
| October-November, 2000 | PASS team works on template for electronic portfolio.<br>PASS team works on grading criteria for Performance Assessment System for Students. |

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